



Don't blame life on Lara

The man behind Lara Croft's *Tomb Raider* games, Jeremy Heath-Smith, believes that computer games companies are easy targets for governments seeking to lay blame for violence in society. The answer, he reckons, is that the industry has to police itself.

"Violence is fine, it's gratuitous violence I have a problem with, and to me there is a huge difference," he told *Interface*. "I never saw the point in *Mortal Kombat* of ripping a heart out. If you enjoy a fighting game, enjoy it for that. Do you want to rip the guy's heart out? Well, I don't and I wouldn't let my children play it — regardless of whether you can turn the option off. That doesn't happen in real life and I'd rather have something that I can relate to."

"Ok, I'm contradicting myself here — do you shoot people in real life? Well, no of course you don't. But if you are watching an adventure movie like *Indiana Jones*, people do get shot. Even James Bond shoots people, but nobody takes it seriously because when somebody gets shot you see them fly back through the air. They don't explode on the screen."

"If someone wants to do that then they should do the serious *Saving Private Ryan* thing. Show that this is how it is, this is what violence is, this is not very nice. In other words, this is pretty unpleasant so don't go there."

"I've never had a problem

Eidos boss Jeremy Heath Smith talks to Tim Wapshott about the grisly issue of violence

with what *Tomb Raider* is as a game. It's fundamentally a fun game and while you are killing baddies, they are just baddies. Anyway, Lara predominantly shoots at animals. The wildlife organisations might not be very



Heath-Smith: soft target

happy with it but I reckon that politically it's fairly correct."

Jeremy runs Core Design, the development house in Derby owned by Eidos Interactive. As one of the leading games publishers in Europe, the press calls come flooding in whenever excessively violent events are in the news, such as the appalling Columbine High School shootings. Politicians are then quick to blame the games industry — according to Jeremy

that's a ludicrous state of affairs.

"The biggest problem is that our industry is a slow-moving target that can't move quick enough to react. We're no different to the movie business, the comic business, the book business and the TV business. To single out the video games industry as an example is, quite frankly, ridiculous. If you really want to be silly about it, take a look at Tom and Jerry — there's nothing more violent than that."

"This is a bigger picture than just trying to blame somebody. Society has created a problem throughout the world — whether it be via drugs, poverty or whatever. There are some sick people out there. Are they twisted by video games? No more than by watching Sylvester Stallone in *Rambo*.

"It's a bigger picture and very easy for a government to shift blame. In America, there are something like 300 million guns registered. You just walk into a shop and buy a gun. It's like buying a packet of sweets. Well, to me there's something wrong there."

"The answer is that as a company you have to be socially aware now. It's down to good companies to have that awareness and police themselves, otherwise you leave your backdoor open. It's obvious that governments don't want to go and pin it on the gun manufacturers. They don't want to change the laws, and they're going to find somebody else to blame."



Lovely Lara: could this vision be responsible for violent acts?

The issue of violence and games aside, Jeremy Heath-Smith reckons the British industry is heading into the next millennium with better recognition than ever — for which much of the credit should go to Eidos.

"Every day there's somebody new writing about us in a lifestyle magazine or a newspaper — and in a positive way rather than a geeky, nerdy way. I think Eidos has to take an awful lot of credit in boosting the industry here, because we are a high profile company now and because our stock price has done so well. We are now hit-

ting the radar screens of a lot of fund managers who can't look at stocks under £40 or £50 or whatever may be the market cap. They've heard of *Tomb Raider* and all of a sudden that is opening up a whole new level of interest.

I feel very confident that Eidos has driven this industry, particularly in the UK and Europe, into being taken far more seriously. Before, it always seemed that the Americans were over here with an office and doing well. All of a sudden we've got our own home-grown success stories."

Win our Raider goodies

THIS weekend *The Times* makes its own gaming news with the launch of the most ambitious interactive co-production the industry has seen. For months we have been working with Core Design to come up with a unique experience built around *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*. We even have our very own Lara Croft game adventure set at *The Times*.

Each week from now until the new year we will print a series of Lara riddles for you to solve. And each week we are giving away mountains of Lara Croft merchandise — including life-size Lara statuettes! But there is much more to our amazing Egyptian *Tomb Raider* event. If you solve the seventh riddle — which you can only do if you have the first six answers — you could win your family a fantastic trip to Egypt and start 2,000 cruising the Nile in style.

In the coming weeks we will also tell you about our own Lara Croft Times level, available free from *The Times* internet site. And we will let you know how to get your hands on a souvenir CD-Rom of the level.

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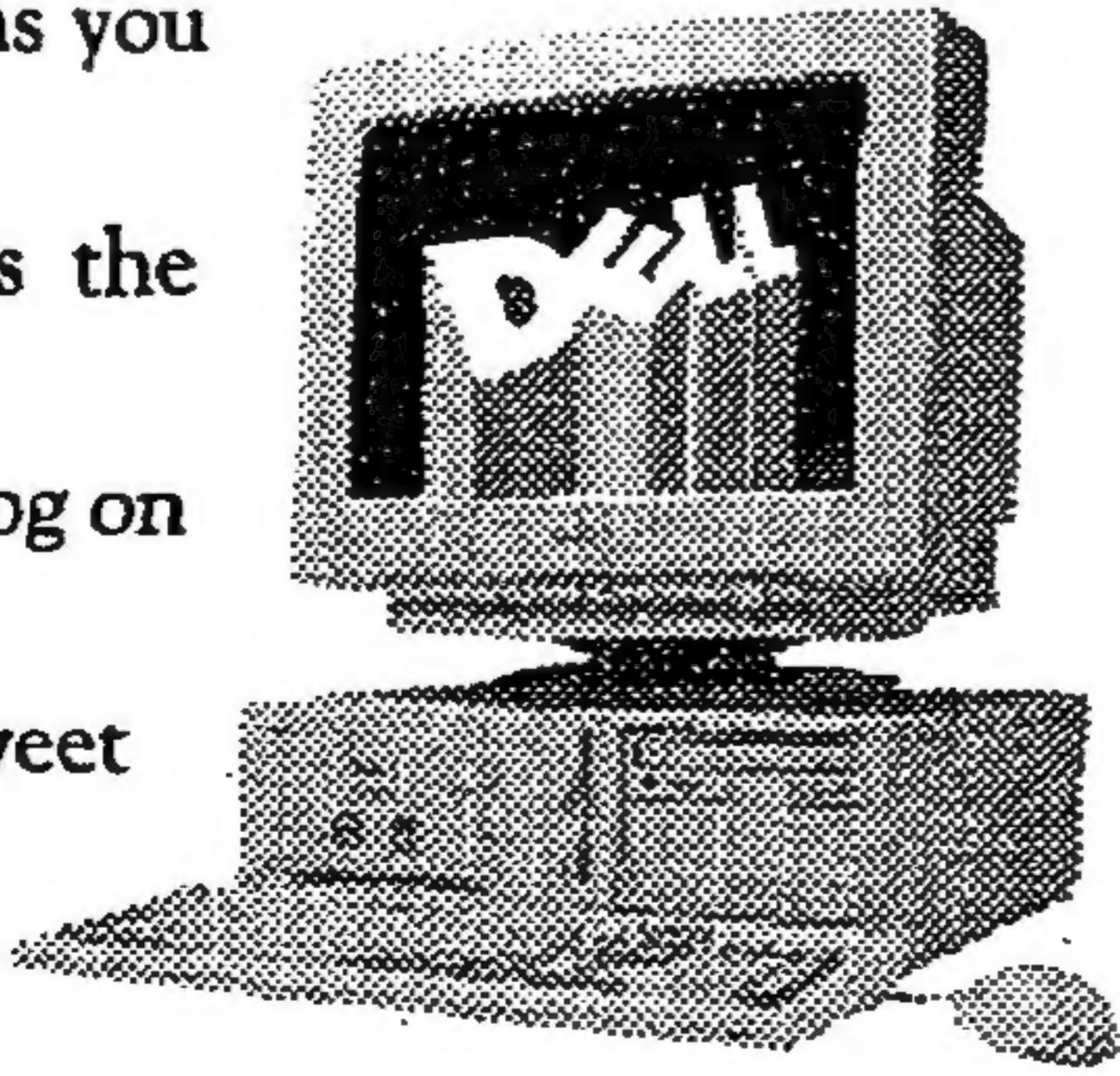
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